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Ex-operative speaks at UI

Nicaraguan Contras described as a creation and tool of CIA

By John McCarthy,
of the Tribune

MOSCOW - An ex-CIA operative says the secret agency leads a policy of "gang rape, mutilation and murder" through the Contras in Nicaragua.

John Stockwell, who says he was the commander of the CIA secret war in Angola in the 1970s, now believes the agency should be abolished.

Stockwell was at the University of Idaho Thursday to give a lecture on the secret wars of the CIA.

In the CIA "we've got an organization that has a 40-year tradition of working with fascist thieves," Stockwell said at an afternoon news conference.

"The CIA, by definition, they are set up above the laws of God and above the laws of man."

Under the Reagan administration and CIA Director William Casey, the agency has been more blatant about lobbying Congress to support its activities, such as support to the Contras, Stockwell said.

The CIA gave from \$50 to \$150 million to the right-leaning Contra forces fighting the left-leaning Sandinista government during the time Congress had banned any U.S. support, he said.

Although Congress approved \$100 million in support this summer, the total amount will be more than \$800 million for the next year including covert aid from the CIA, Stockwell said.

From the beginning the Contras have been a CIA creation, not a rebel force with any popular support in Nicaragua, he said. "There was no Contra force in 1980, until 1981 when the CIA started to give them money."

The Contras have brutalized the people for whose rights they are supposedly fighting, Stockwell said, saying Contra soldiers have committed "gang rape, mutilation and murder" while under the CIA's direction. He claimed such brutality has been documented by independent groups of observers.

Reagan "has committed his presidency to getting rid of the Sandinistas." CIA activities are designed to that end, the former operative said.

But the Contras have at best one chance in 100 of driving out the Sandinistas, he said. "We've never yet been able to buy a revolution."

The ultimate direction of Reagan policy will be to send in U.S. troops to fight against the Sandinistas, Stockwell claimed.

The entire anti-Sandinista campaign is misguided and unneeded, he said.

After the overthrow of Somoza (a former Nicaraguan leader) in 1979 by the Sandinistas "it wouldn't have been very difficult for us to go down there and join hands with them ... We

could have had the most healthy country in Central America in Nicaragua," he said.

Stockwell said the Sandinistas did not break off relations with the United States, they abolished the death sentence, they began a literacy campaign that is used as a model in El Salvador, they instituted land reform and they improved health care.

The Sandinista government also made a lot of mistakes and acted immature in some international relations. But the U.S. policy pushed the Sandinistas toward the Cubans and it could have been the opposite, Stockwell said.

In Nicaragua, Cuba, Chile, Iran, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Pakistan the CIA has supported dictators "who steal billions of dollars from their countries while the people starve," he said.

Stockwell was in Vietnam with the CIA during the April 1975 evacuation of Saigon. He called the abandonment of documents and people by the United States "a violation of every principle of integrity that I had ever heard of."

Although he was "deeply troubled" by the agency policies at the time, he made a "deal with the devil" to see how it operated from the inside as the commander in Angola.

After Angola, he said he listened to then-CIA director William Colby "perjure himself" before a Congressional sub-committee to cover up the covert war in Africa.

Stockwell later left the CIA and testified before the same sub-committee to for what he thought would be "five days giving them irrefutable, absolute evidence to put Henry Kissinger and Bill Colby in jail" for what he called their perjury on CIA activities in Angola, he said.

But he said nothing happened after the closed hearings.

The irony of the CIA, according to Stockwell, is that not only does it specialize in "destabilization and covert war," it also doesn't provide reliable intelligence information.

Its emphasis is promote violence and covert action - not diplomatic solutions, he said.

"I am very skeptical that a great country like the United States needs to have a policy to brutalize people of small nations ... this great powerful nation does not need to feed on the blood of these people."